



Written evidence submitted by the EFRA Committee (APH0163)

APHA visit note

Date: 10 December 2024

Location: Animal and Plant Health Agency, Weybridge, Woodham Lane, New Haw, Addlestone, Surrey, KT15 3NB

Attendees

Alistair Carmichael (Chair), Sarah Bool, Charlie Dewhirst, Jayne Kirkham, Josh Newbury, Andrew Pakes, Jenny Riddell-Carpenter, Tim Roca, Henry Tufnell

APHA: Jenny Stewart (Interim Chief Executive), Elizabeth Buchanan (Chair), Yvonne Spencer (Director of Science Capability), Matt Chinn (Director of Science, Operational and Research), Andrew Soldan (Veterinary Director), Dan Horton (Head of Virology), Ashley Banyard (Virology), Aled Edwards (Head of England Field Delivery), Francesca Martelli (Bacteriology), Rod Card (Bacteriology), Eileen Tottle (Chief of Staff to the Chief Executive)

Defra: Colin Dingwall (Senior Responsible Officer, Science Capability in Animal Health Programme), Sarah Homer (Director General for Portfolio Delivery), Louise Leighton-McTague (Deputy Director, Exotic and Endemic Disease Control)

Veterinary Medicines Directorate: Abigail Seager (Chief Executive)

Prospect: Janine Gielbert, Sam Connelly, Will Jewers

Public and Commercial Services Union: Paul Anderson, Carl Maniglia

Topics of discussion

The Committee received an introduction to the work of the APHA before undertaking a tour of the Weybridge site. The Committee then conducted a roundtable discussion with attendees to reflect on the tour and matters relating to the work of the APHA.

Notable points of discussion are set out below.

- The **importance of the APHA** to biosecurity, animal and plant health, trade, food security, animal welfare and public health. There was discussion about the **need to raise the profile and status of the APHA** across government and with the public to strengthen understanding of the vital role of the Agency and the need for significant investment.
- The Committee learned about the APHA's **world class science capabilities**. The APHA is designated as a global reference laboratory for 22 animal disease specialisms – more than any other institution globally – demonstrating the UK's global leadership and soft power.
- The Committee received presentations on **threats** including bluetongue, avian influenza and anti-microbial resistance (AMR). The importance of a **One Health** approach was emphasised through discussion of AMR and zoonotic diseases; 60 per cent of new diseases affecting humans originate in animals. Attendees discussed the context of the increasing pressures of climate change and the movement of people and goods around the world. The Committee



- heard about the pressures of **concurrent outbreaks** and the disruption this can cause to important 'peacetime' research and programmes.
- The **poor condition of the APHA Weybridge estate** was apparent from the tour of the site. The Committee saw world-class scientists conducting essential work in sub-optimal, precarious conditions. The Committee heard that the condition of the estate makes the APHA's work harder and causes disruption. The APHA's workforce are conducting vital, globally significant work regardless but could deliver even more, even better with appropriate facilities. The newest building on the Weybridge site is more than 20 years old and the existing facilities are unable to be upgraded further to meet the needs of the Agency. The Committee heard about the need to future-proof facilities so that they are suitable for the threats and scientific methods of the future.
- The **necessity of the the Science Capability in Animal Health Programme (SCAH)** was clear. APHA, Weybridge is four years into the fifteen-year redevelopment programme, the cost of which was estimated as £2.8 billion in [November 2021](#). The Autumn Budget 2024 allocated £200 million to the APHA as a stopgap, which is welcomed, but it is essential that full funding for the programme is granted in due course. Further funding will be considered as part of the Spending Review and the final business case for the SCAH programme is expected late 2026, early 2027. The Committee was shown site plans for the redevelopment and heard about progress being made on the programme. Attendees discussed the challenges and importance of conserving capability throughout the site's redevelopment programme so that the APHA's work can continue.
- **Digital infrastructure and technology** need investment to move the APHA away from paper processes and to strengthen data management, resilience and efficiency.
- **People** are an integral part of the APHA. 600 scientists work at Weybridge, supported by engineers and other specialists. **Recruitment and retention** within the APHA workforce were discussed, including the chronic shortage of veterinarians in the UK. The Committee heard that the recruitment of deep specialists is particularly challenging. **Reward and recognition** were discussed as part of this, including the limitations of staff being embedded in the Civil Service pay system; specialism and expertise are not easily rewarded and pay is not competitive with the private sector. The Committee heard that variation in pay between different arm's-length bodies creates workforce churn as staff zig zag across organisations to achieve career progression due to lack of opportunities to progress within their existing workplace. The Committee heard that a strategy is needed for this workforce across the UK.
- **International comparisons** were discussed. The Friedrich-Loeffler-Institut in Germany and the National Bio and Agro-Defense Laboratory in Kansas, USA, were signposted to the Committee as international exemplars of biosecurity infrastructure.